

إخلاص



# *Sincerity*

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*by*

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وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ۗ

wa-la-dhikru-llāhi ʾakbar

and the remembrance of Allāh is the greatest!  
(Sūrah al-Aʿnabūt 29:45)



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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Sincerity (إخلاص) °Ikḥlās

Abū Ruqayyah Tamīm ad-Dārī relates that the Prophet ﷺ said: “Religion is Sincerity.” We asked: “To whom, O Messenger of Allāh? He said: “To Allāh, His Book, His Messenger, and the leaders of the Muslims and to the common Muslim.” [Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim]

Sincerity (°Ikḥlās) in °Islām:

Three Persons in a Cave (Sincere Faith and Worship)

The Prophet ﷺ related: “Three persons from the tribe of Bani Israel got together and started out on a journey. On the way, clouds gathered above them and it started to pour with rain and so they sought shelter in a nearby cave.

“Suddenly, a large boulder slipped and blocked the entrance to the cave, trapping the three inside and transforming the day into a dark night for them. They had no other alternative except to turn to Allāh ﷻ for help.

“Let us use our sincere deeds as a means to obtain deliverance from this predicament,” suggested one of them. All the others agreed with the suggestion.

“One of them said, ‘Oh Lord! You are aware that I have an extremely attractive cousin and that I was infatuated and obsessed with her. One day, finding her alone, I took hold of her and wanted to satisfy my carnal desires, when she spoke out to me saying: ‘Oh my cousin! Fear Allāh ﷻ and do not harm my chastity. Hearing this, I crushed my lustful tendencies and decided against the evil act. Oh Lord! If that deed of mine had been out of absolute sincerity and only for the purpose of acquiring Your pleasure, deliver us from grief and perdition.’”

“Suddenly they witnessed that the huge boulder had moved away a little, faintly brightening up the interior of the cave.

“The second person spoke out, ‘Oh Lord! You know that I had a father and a mother, so old that their bodies had bent over due to their excessive age, and that I used to tend to them regularly.

“One night, having brought them their food, I observed that both of them were asleep. I passed the entire night near them, the food in hand, without waking them up for fear of disturbing them. Oh Lord! If this deed of mine had been only for the sake of Your pleasure and happiness, open up a way for us and grant us salvation.”

“As he completed his speech, the group noticed that the boulder had moved aside a little more.

“The third person supplicated, ‘Oh Knower of every thing, both hidden and manifest! You know Yourself that I had a worker who used to work for me. When his term had reached its termination, I handed over to him his wages, but he was not pleased and desired more and, in a state of dissatisfaction and displeasure, he walked off. I used his wage to purchase a sheep, which I looked after separately and very soon I had a flock in my possession.

“After a period of time, the worker again approached me for his wage and I pointed towards the flock of sheep. Initially, he thought I was ridiculing him, but later, realizing my seriousness, took the entire flock and left. Oh Lord! If this act had been prompted by sincerity and had only been for Your pleasure, deliver us from this quandary.”

“At this point the entire boulder moved aside from the mouth of the cave and all three emerged from it, joyous and ecstatic, and continued their journey.”



### Sincerity in ʾIslām:

Shayṭān and the Pious Worshipper

(العابد المخلص)

In the tribe of Bani Israel, there once lived a pious worshipper. One day, the people informed him that at a certain location, there existed a tree that was being worshipped by a tribe. When he heard this, the man flew into a rage, picked up his axe and set out to cut down the tree.

Shayṭān, appearing before him in the form of an old man, and asked him, “Where are you headed?”

The pious worshipper replied, “I intend to cut down the tree, which is being worshipped so that the people worship Allāh ﷻ instead.”

Shayṭān said, “Hold yourself till you hear what I have to say.”

The pious worshipper told him to move but the Shayṭān continued, “Allāh ﷻ has His own Prophets ﷺ and if it had been essential to cut down the tree, He would have sent them to perform the task.”

As it was the man didn’t agree with Shayṭān and went on his way.

“There is no way I am going to let you do it,” said Shayṭān angrily, and he began to wrestle with the man. In the ensuing contest, the pious worshipper hurled Shayṭān to the ground.

“Wait! I have something else to say to you”, pleaded Shayṭān.

“Listen! You are a poor man. If you could possess wealth by means of which you could give alms to the other worshippers it would be much better than cutting the tree. If you refrain from cutting the tree, I shall place two gold coins beneath your pillow every day.”

The pious man said thoughtfully, “If you speak the truth, I shall give one coin in charity while the other coin I shall put to my own use. This is better than cutting down the tree; in any case, I have neither been ordered to perform this task nor am I a Prophet ﷺ to burden myself with unnecessary grief and anxiety.”

Thus did the man accede to the request of Shayṭān who left him alone. For two days, he received the two coins and utilized them, but on the third day, there was no sign of the gold coins. Upset and distressed, he picked up his axe and set out to cut down the tree.

On the way he again encountered Shayṭān, who asked him: “Where are you going now?”

“I am going to cut down that tree.” replied the man

“There is no way you are going to do it,” said the Shayṭān

Once again they began to wrestle, but this time Shayṭān overcame him and hurled him to the ground and ordered, “Turn back or I shall cut off your head.”

Sincerity or ʾIkhlāṣ (إخلاص)

The man said, “Leave me alone and I shall return, but tell me, how was it that I had managed to overcome you on the previous occasion?”

Shayṭān answered, “Then, you had set out only for Allāh ﷻ and you were sincere in your intention as a result of which, Allāh ﷻ subjugated me to you, but this time you were angry for your own self and your gold coins and so I was able to overpower you.”

قَالَ فَبِعِزَّتِكَ لَا أُغْوِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ إِلَّا عِبَادَكَ مِنْهُمْ الْمُخْلِصِينَ

qāla fa-bi-ʿizzatika la-ʾughwiannahum ʿajāma-ina  
ʾilla ʿibādaka minhum-l-mukhlāṣīn

[Iblis] said, “So by Your Might I shall seduce them, every one — save for the sincere ones among Your worshippers.”

(Sūrah Ṣāād 38:82-3)



قُلْ إِنَّ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

qul ʾinna ṣalātī wa nusukī wa maḥyāya wa mamātī  
li-llāhi rabbi-l-ʿalamīn

Say, “Truly my worship,  
and my sacrifice and my living and my dying are for Allāh,  
Lord of all the worlds.

(Sūrah-l-Anʿam 6:162)



إِنَّمَا الْعَمَلُ بِالنِّيَّةِ

ʾinnama-l-ʿamak bi-n-niyah

Surely action is by intention

ʿUmar b. al-Khattab رضي الله عنه narrated that the Prophet ﷺ said: “Deeds are [a result] only of the intentions [of the actor], and an individual is [rewarded] only according to that which he intends. Therefore, whosoever has emigrated for the sake of Allāh and His Messenger ﷺ, then his emigration was for Allāh and His Messenger ﷺ.

Whosoever emigrated for the sake of worldly gain, or a woman [whom he desires] to marry, then his emigration is for the sake of that which [moved him] to emigrate.” Narrated by Bukḥarī and Muslim.

This was the first ḥadīth (الحديث) that Bukḥarī recorded in his book, where it serves the purpose of the introduction and discourse (*kḥutbah*), pointing out that all deeds that are devoid of the proper intention are vain (*bāṭil* / باطل). °Abd al-Raḥmān b. Maḥdi is reported to have said that, “Were I to compose a book comprised of various chapters, I would place the ḥadīth of °Umar ؓ regarding deeds and intentions in front of each chapter.”

This is one of the solid °aḥadīth which serves as an axis of °Islām. ash-Shafi°ī said that it comprises a third of all religious knowledge. °Aḥmad b. Hanbāl said that the principle axes of °Islām, in terms of ḥadīth, are three: the ḥadīth of °Umar that “deeds are judged only by intention,” the ḥadīth of °Ā°isha, “Whoever introduces into our affairs that which does not belong, it is rejected,” and the ḥadīth of al-Nu°man b. Bashīr, “The licit is clear and the illicit is clear.” °Ishāq b. Rahawyahi also included this ḥadīth as one of the axes of °Islām. °Abū Dawūd, the collector of the Sunan, is reported to have said that of the 4,800 °aḥadīth in his book, it is sufficient if a person knows four, the ḥadīth of °Umar regarding intentions and deeds, the ḥadīth, “Part of a person’s virtue in °Islām is to ignore that which is of no concern to him,” the ḥadīth, “The believer is not a believer unless he loves for his brother what he loves for himself,” and the ḥadīth, “the licit is clear and the illicit is clear.”

The first question regarding this ḥadīth is whether it refers to all actions, or only those actions whose validity requires an intention (*niyah*/نية)? If it refers only to those actions whose validity requires an intention, it would not apply to the customary areas of human life, e.g., eating, drinking, clothes, etc., as well as transactional matters, e.g., fulfilling financial duties and returning misappropriated properties.

The other opinion is that the ḥadīth refers to all actions.

ʾIbn Rajab attributes the first position to the later scholars whereas the second position he attributes to earlier scholars.

The first sentence (ʾinnama al-aʾmal bi-l-niyah/إنما الأعمال بالنية) of the ḥadīth is a declaration that the voluntary actions of a person are a consequence only of that person's purpose to perform the act or bring it into existence (*lā taqa ʾilla ʾan qaṣd min al-ʿamil huwa sabab ʿamaliha wa wujudiha*). The second sentence, (*wa innama li-kulli ʿimrī ma nawa*) is a declaration of religion's judgment of the act in question (ʾikbar ʾan al-ḥukm al-ṣharʿi). Thus, if the intention motivating an act is good, then performance of the act is good and the person receives its reward. As for the corrupt intention, the action that it motivates is corrupt, and the person receives punishment for it. If the intention motivating the act is permissible, then the action is permissible, and the one who does it receives neither reward nor punishment. Therefore, acts in themselves, their goodness, foulness or neutrality, from the perspective of religion, are judged according to the doer's intention that caused their existence.

niyah is used in two senses by the scholars of ʾIslām. The first is to distinguish some acts of worship from others, e.g., ṣalat al-dḥuhr from ṣalat al-ʿaṣr or to distinguish acts of worship (ʿibādāt/العبادات) from mundane matters (ʾadāt). This is the primary usage of the term in the books of the fuqaha<sup>2</sup>. The second usage is to distinguish an action that is performed for the sake of Allāh ﷻ from an act done for the sake of Allāh ﷻ and others, or just for the sake of other than Allāh ﷻ.

This second meaning is that which is intended by the gnostics (*al-ʿarifūn/العرفون*) in their discussions of sincerity (ʾikhlāṣ) and related matters. This is the same meaning that is intended by the Pious Ancestors (*as-salaf aṣ-ṣāliḥ/السلف الصالح*) when they use the term *niyah*. In the Qurʾān, the speech of the Prophet ﷺ and the speech of the salaf ﷺ, the term *niyah* is synonymous, or usually, with the term desire (ʾiraḍa) and related terms, e.g., ʾibtighā<sup>3</sup>. The texts testifying to this usage are too numerous to be cited, but include verses like “Among you are those who desire (*yurīd*) the profane world and among you are those who desire (*yurīd*) the next,”



Other verses such as, “You desire (*turidūn*) the profit of the profane world but Allāh desires [for you] the next,” and “Whosoever desires (*yurīd*) the harvest of the profane world (*dunyā*), etc.” and “Whosoever desires the immediate [gratification of the profane world], we hasten to him what We wish to whom We desire,” and “Do not expel those who call out to their Lord in the early morn and in the evening, who are seekers (*yuridun*) of His face, and let not your eyes wander from them out of covetous desire (*turīd*) for the frivolity of the profane world.”

Likewise, ʾImām Aḥmad and al-Nasaʿī report that the Prophet ﷺ said that, “Whosoever took part in a military campaign in the cause of Allāh, but sought only booty [by doing so], shall gain [only] what he intended (*nawa*),” and on the authority of ʾImām Aḥmad, “Most of the martyrs of my community shall die in their beds (*ʾaṣḥab al-furush*), and many a man that is killed in battle whose intention is known only to Allāh shall not be among the martyrs”, and the ḥadīth of Saʿd b. Abī Waqqas in al-Bukhārī, where the Prophet ﷺ says “Indeed, you shall never spend of your property an amount whereby you are desirous (*tabtaghi*) of pleasing Allāh save that you shall be rewarded for it, even the morsel of food that you place in the mouth of your wife.” Similarly, it is reported that ʿUmar said “One who has no intention (*niyah*) has no [meritorious] deeds (*la ʿamala li-man la niyahta lahu*).

Despite the importance of having a good *niyah*, and its centrality to ʾIslām, it is among the most difficult things to achieve. Thus, Sufyan al-Thawrī is reported to have said, “Nothing is more difficult for me to treat than my intention (*niyah*) for indeed it turns on me!” Yusuf b. Asbat said, “Purifying one's intention from corruption is more difficult for persons than lengthy struggle (*ʾijtihād*).”

An act that is not done sincerely for the sake of Allāh may be divided into parts:

The first is that which is solely for display (*riyaʾ*) such that its sole motivation is to be seen by others in order to achieve a goal in the profane world, as was the case of the hypocrites (*al-munāfiqīn*/

(المنافقين) in their performance of prayer, where Allāh described them as, “When they join prayer, they go lazily [with the purpose] of displaying [themselves] to the people.”

At other times, an action might be partially for the sake of Allāh ﷻ and partially to display one's self in front of the people. If the desire to display one's self arose at the origin of the action, then the action is vain. ʾImām ʾAḥmad reports that the Prophet ﷺ said, “When Allāh gathers the first [of His creation] and the last [of His creation] for that Day for which there is no doubt, a crier will call out, “Whosoever associated with Me another in his actions, let him seek his reward from other than Allāh, for Allāh is independent of any association (*fa-inna Allāha aghna al-sharaka ʿan al-shirk*).”

al-Nasaʿi reported that a man asked the Prophet ﷺ, “What is your opinion of one who fights [in the way of Allāh] seeking fame [in the world] and reward [from Allāh]?” The Prophet ﷺ replied, “He receives nothing [by way of reward from Allāh].” The Prophet ﷺ repeated this three times and then said, “Allāh accepts no deeds other than those that are performed solely for His sake and by which His face is sought.” In other words an act is corrupted by any desire to display one's self (*riyāʾ*/رِيَاء) and that act is rejected,

If one's intention is corrupted with something other than the desire to display one's self, e.g., to earn profit whilst on a jihad in the path of Allāh ﷻ, such an intention reduces one's reward (*ajr*) from jihad, but does not negate it entirely. Muslim reported in his Saḥīḥ that the Prophet ﷺ said that, “Soldiers in the path of Allāh attain two-thirds of their reward immediately when they obtain booty [from the enemy], whereas they receive their reward in its entirety when they obtain nothing from the enemy.”

ʾIbn ʿUyayna said that Mutarrif b. ʿAbd Allāh would repeat the following prayer, “O Allāh! I seek Your forgiveness for that which I sought your repentance but to which I subsequently returned; I seek Your forgiveness from that which I rendered to You from my self, but then, I was not able to maintain faithfully; and, I seek Your forgiveness from that by which I claimed I desired your Face but my heart became corrupted with that which I did.”

In conclusion, the saying of Saḥl b. °Abd Allāh is most beautiful in this regard: “Nothing is more difficult on a person than sincerity because the person gains no share of that [act].”

قُلْ هَلْ نُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِالْأَخْسَرِينَ أَعْمَالًا  
الَّذِينَ ضَلَّ سَعْيُهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا  
وَهُمْ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ يُحْسِنُونَ صُنْعًا

qul hal nunabbi°ukum bi-l-°akḥsarina °a°mālā?  
al-ladhīna ḍalla sa°yuhum fi-l-ḥayāti-d-dunyā  
wa hum yaḥsabūna °annuhum yuḥsinūna ṣun°ā

Say, “Shall We tell you who will be the greatest losers in their actions?  
Those whose efforts have been wasted in this worldly life  
while they thought they were doing good.”  
(Sūrah al-Kahf 18:104-104)

وَاذْكُرْ عِبَادَنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ أُولِيَ الْأَيْدِي وَالْأَبْصَارِ  
إِنَّا أَخْلَصْنَاهُمْ بِخَالِصَةٍ ذِكْرَى الدَّارِ

wa dhkur °ibādanāā °ibārāhīma wa °ishāqa wa ya°qūba  
°ulī-°aydī wa-l-°abāṣārī  
°innā °akḥlaṣnāhum bi-kḥālīṣatin dhikra-d-dār

And remember Our worshippers °Ibrahīm, °Ishāq and Ya°qūb,  
— those of power [and] spiritual vision —  
Truly We purified their sincerity with a distinct quality  
— remembrance of the Final Abode —  
(Sūrah Ṣāād 38:45-44)

When one is blessed with power and spiritual vision and remembers in this world the next world, consequentially, one seeks to perfect his or her actions through the development and purification of one’s intention (*niyah*) lest, through forgetfulness (*ghaflah*), he or she is reduced to looking back upon this life with regret.

So that one does not come to the end realising that there is nothing left to indicate that one had spent years in this world and gained no lasting reward; neither the people whose approval one sought and strove to acquire, nor the worldly goals one pursued, nor one's arrogance, nor the ṣhayṭān who deceived one by damaging one's sincerity insisting on the primacy of the dunyā over the ʾākḥira, will stand by one. Instead one will stand in the presence of Allāh ﷻ alone and unaided because one failed to turn to Him in the world with a pure heart, and harmed the sincerity of his or intention by combining one's faith, service and worship with worldly objectives.

The capital of the Path is, in truth, nothing other than sincerity. Sincerity has been defined as “showing yourself as you really are” and “being inwardly what you show yourself to be”.

One may speak of three stages of sincerity: sincerity with oneself, sincerity with the Prophet ﷺ and his living legatees, the ʾawliya and the ṣhuyukḥ ﷺ, and sincerity with Allāh ﷻ.

Righteous deeds that are acceptable by Allāh ﷻ are those actions that have passed through the doors of moral purification and sincerity. What are called “good deeds” but lack moral purification and sincerity can never merit the favor of Allāh ﷻ.

Therefore, good deeds (*amal ṣaliḥ*), if separated from sincerity, will never have any spiritual value in the sight of Allāh ﷻ. The ṣaḥābah ﷺ were able to achieve great work for ʾIslām since their outward conduct was perfectly harmonious with their inner intentions. Allāh ﷻ gave His blessings and help in all the affairs of the ṣaḥābah ﷺ because they lived a life of pure sincerity. We, too, can qualify for the assistance of Allāh ﷻ if we can model our life on the sincerity of the ṣaḥābah ﷺ and their successors, the ʾawliya-Llāh karām ﷺ.

Viewing the present situation of the ʾummaḥ it is clear that our way of life, our family, our belief system, and our lands are everywhere under attack. In Truth (*ḥaqiqqah*) the enemies of ʾIslām, outward and inward, have targeted the entire ʾummaḥ, or what has been called the “Empire of Consciousness”, with the view of destroying it, seducing it or reducing it simply to a private matter behind doors.

We are left with two powerful remedies to cure this situation: repentance for our carelessness (*tawbah*) and living sincerely. Spiritual life and sincerity are the two keys that can change the sad conditions that characterize our present situation. Living a truly sincere spiritual life in direct obedience to the will of Allāh ﷻ and the *sunnah* of His Prophet ﷺ is our only real and truly powerful defense against our worldly enemies, without and within.

Let us now speak of the stages mentioned above: sincerity with oneself, sincerity with the Prophet ﷺ and his living legates, the ʾawliya and the shuyukh, and sincerity with Allāh ﷻ.

The early Muslims were the acknowledged leaders of the world because of their spirituality and because of their sincere love for Allāh ﷻ and their careful attention to the true practice (*sunnah*) of the Prophet ﷺ founded on the saying of Allāh:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

wa mā ʾarsalnākā ʾillā raḥmatal-li-l-ʿālamīn

“And we have not sent you save as a Mercy to all the worlds.  
[to all being]

(Sūrah al-ʾAmbiyāʾ 21:07)

During these times of intense personal and communal spirituality and sincere commitment, the kalimah (كلمة طيب), “*la ilaha illa-llāh muḥammad rasulu-llāh*” (لا اله الا الله محمد رسول الله) was proclaimed from the lands of Arabia, to Africa, to Andalusia, to the Balkans, Central Asia, Turkey, the Indian Subcontinent, Mongolia, China, Indonesia and the Philippine islands. During these times the ʾummah manifested as a beautiful and harmonious combination of Arab, Turkish, Indian, Mughal, Byzantine, and Persian, Maylay and Indonesian cultures; an ʾIslām that was (and is) indeed in truth a very cosmopolitan, tolerant, and universal faith. Our ancestors’ brave proclamation of the greatness of Allāh (*Allāhu ʾAkbar*) and their sincere intention to propagate the message of ʾIslām to the whole world brought about opening after opening (*fath*), victory after victory (*naṣr*), winning the hearts of peoples by their message of the oneness (*tawhīd*) of Allāh ﷻ and the universal mercy (*raḥmah*) of the Prophet ﷺ.

The spirituality (*ruḥānniyat*) and sincerity (ʾ*ikḥlas*) coupled with mercy and love (*maḥabbat*) of those who went before us were the reasons why we were able to truly establish ʾIslām on a broad scale. These past moments of opening and victory for ʾIslām have largely escaped from us due to our carelessness (*ghaflah*), love of self, love for fame, and love for the world.

We should say that, indeed, throughout the whole world even in the present time there are examples of this same light, love and greatness. That this is so is directly due to the the real establishment in the hearts of individuals of the virtues of love, justice, mercy, peace and deep sincerity that in most cases is fostered by the living legatees of the noble salaf ﷺ, who are precicely the ʾawliya-Llāh karam ﷺ, and the G-d-conscious (*mutṭaqqi*) shūyukh ﷺ who carry on the mission of the Prophet ﷺ and his ṣaḥabah ﷺ in the present time and present world. If you were to examine all of these, known and unknown, what you would find is that at heart and in their deepest being they are above all — sincere (*mukhlis*).

I know this on a very personal level from my own blessed shaykh, Dr. ʾIbraḥīm Muḥammad al-Baṭawi ﷺ, who made clear in his teachings to me and all of his muridīn that the one virtue that he esteemed over all other virtues in his students was their sincerity. Indeed the greatest praise he ever gave any of his many students was to say of that person, “He is an honest one.” ‘*Honest*’ was the word he used in English to translate the Arabic ʾ*ikḥlās*.

So what is this honesty — this sincerity?

الإِخْلَاصُ سِرٌّ مِنْ سِرِّي اسْتَوْدَعْتَهُ قَلْبٍ مَنْ أُحْبَبْتُ مِنْ عِبَادِي

*al-ʾikḥlāsu sirrum-min sirrī*

*ʾistawdaʿtahu qalbi min ʾaḥbabtu min ʿibadi*

“Pure sincerity is a secret from My Secrets  
that I have deposited in the heart of My slave.”

The above is from an *ḥadīth qudsī* where Allāh ﷻ speaks on the tongue of the Prophet ﷺ.

We find the very definition of the essence of this sincerity in the following ʾāyat:

Sincerity or °Ikḥlās (إخلاص)

أَلَا لِلَّهِ الدِّينُ الْخَالِصُ

°alaā li-llāhi -d-dīnu-l-khālīs

Surely the pure Dīn belongs to Allāh  
(Sūrah az-Zumar 39:3)



In this instance it is helpful to understand that sincerity or °ikḥlās is derived from the root in Arabic *kḥa-la-ṣa* (خ ل ص) used in the above °āyat, which means to be pure, unmixed, unadulterated, to be free or to become free, liberated, to be cleared, to be rid of, to be saved, rescued or escape (from something). In its second form (II) it means to clear, to purify, to refine, to purge, to rectify, to redeem, to deliver. In its third form (III) it means to act with integrity, with sincerity, to treat fairly. In its form as *al-°ikḥlās* it translates as pure sincerity, sincere devotion, total attachment, sincere affection, frankness, loyalty, faithfulness, fidelity and unstinting allegiance.

Since Allāh ﷻ has no need (*ghanī*) whatsoever there is no necessity to supply Him with partners or to associate (*shirk*) anyone or anything with Him. There must be at the beginning of the way (*ṭariqah*) a sincere purity, and internal integrity, a total attachment which is, at its zenith, a light from the light (*nūr*) of Allāh ﷻ which He has placed in the heart of His believing worshipper; a light which keeps that slave (°*abd*) from looking to others for what they cannot provide. This light is the pure light of sincerity which is so bright that even the angels ﷺ cannot register or comprehend it and the shayṭān cannot corrupt or deflect away from it.

Our grand shaykh, Sīdī °Abu-l Ḥasan ash-Shadhḥulī ﷺ, said, “Once I was circumambulating (*tawāff*/طواف) the Ka°bah and searching in my innermost self (*sirr*) for sincerity. All at once I heard a voice calling to me saying, “How often is it that you draw near to Me with those (*al-muqarrabīn*) who draw near to Me — and I am the All-Hearing, the Near, the All-Knowing and the Knower. By My definition I will cause you to dispense with the knowledge of the ancients and the moderns save that of the Messengers and the Prophets ﷺ.

This knowledge consists of four things which are all based on one: Sincerity on the part of the one who is sincere to one who is sincere by Him for the sake of the one who is sincere to Him,”

As such sincerity is of two kinds: The pure sincerity of the Truthful Ones (*aṣ-ṣādiqīn*) and the pure sincerity of the Devoted Ones (*aṣ-ṣiddiqīn*).

The sincerity of the Truthful Ones is for obtaining spiritual rewards (*al-ajr*) and benefits (*ath-thawāb*).

The sincerity of the Devoted Ones is a pure sincerity which is entirely for the purpose of arriving to the Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*) and to nothing but or except Him ﷻ.

These Pure Sincere Ones are *al-mukhliṣīn* and Shaykh °Abu-l-Ḥasan describes them thus:

“These are the people who Allāh ﷻ has created for His Pure worship and purified for faithfulness to His Divine Unity (*tawḥīdu rubūbiyah*) and the following of His Divinely Revealed Way (*shari‘atahū*).

“He has pleased them by the secrets of the Lights of His Presence (*bi-°anwāri haḍratihī*) and supported their spirits by the meanings of Spiritual Wisdom (*bi-ma‘ani-l-ma‘arif*) and granted them His providential solicitude (*°inayātihi*). He has made their intelligence (*al-°aql*) to roam in His Vast Sublimity (*°aḍḥīmatahu*) and enlightened the darkness of their nafs, thus removing them from the oppressive darkness of ignorance (*ḍḥulmu-l-jahl*). He has guided them by the stars of knowledge (*°ilm*) and the sun of His Spiritual Knowledge (*ma‘arifathu*).

“He has consolidated their doctrinal understanding (*°aqa°iduhum*) by clear proofs (*burhān*) from His Book and the practices (*sunnah*) of His Prophet ﷺ. He has obliterated their personal might by establishing the Victory of His Wishes. He has concealed their will (*°irādatuhum*) by the Supremacy of His Will and He has beautified them with the embellishment of abstinence (*zuhd*) and made them to dwell in the condition of total reliance (*tawakkul*).



“He has honored them with scrupulousness (*al-waraʿ*) and the light of knowledge (*ʿilmu-n-nūr*), and widened their learning. He has inspired them (*ʾilhamahum*) abundantly and munificently. He has enriched them till they have no need of others.

“He made some from among them to be the keys (*mafatih*) to open the hearts of other mortals and He made them to be the flowing springs (*yanābiʿa*) of the Great Wisdom (*al-ḥikmatu-l-kubra*) from which they both receive and give to the people secretly and openly. Some of them are veiled by Destiny (*satarathu-l-ʾaḡadār*) in order that they might become isolated (*fārid*) in the truth of their secret. You will never know them by their appearance for their inner soul is with the Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*) and only outwardly do they appear as creatures. They are both present and not present due to their annihilation. Their outer appearance is poverty (*al-faqr*) and their inner reality is abundant wealth (*al-ghina*). They are formed on the character of the Messenger ﷺ to whom Allāh ﷻ said,

وَوَجَدَكَ عَائِلًا فَأَغْنَى

wa wajadaka ʾāʾilān fa-āghnā

“and We found you impoverished and enriched [you].”

(Sūrah ad-Duhā 93:8)

Did He, Allāh the Almighty ﷻ, enrich him ﷺ with money? Hardly! It was he ﷺ who tied a rock around his stomach to ward off hunger and it was he ﷺ who fed the entire army from a single plate; and it was he ﷺ who left Makkah on foot with nothing to eat, who mounted the Burāq and rode to the furthest place of prostration (*al-masjidul-ʾaḡsa*) in a flash, who led the other Prophets ﷺ in prayer, who ascended to the highest heavens and reached the tree of infinity (*sidratu-l-muntahī*) and came to the nearness of two bows' length. He ﷺ who saw what he ﷺ saw and his ﷺ heart was not deceived nor did it deceive him ﷺ. This is a journey that no other human had ever made or has made since. It demonstrates the ability of Allāh ﷻ to bring the seemingly impossible into being. Here, the concepts of time and space as we know them do not apply, as it is beyond our human capabilities to understand the true omnipotence of Allāh ﷻ.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
 وَالنَّجْمِ إِذَا هَوَىٰ ﴿١﴾ مَا ضَلَّ صَاحِبُكُمْ وَمَا غَوَىٰ ﴿٢﴾  
 وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ ﴿٣﴾ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ ﴿٤﴾  
 عَلَّمَهُ شَدِيدُ الْقُوَىٰ ﴿٥﴾ ذُو مِرَّةٍ فَاسْتَوَىٰ ﴿٦﴾  
 وَهُوَ بِالْأُفُقِ الْأَعْلَىٰ ﴿٧﴾ ثُمَّ دَنَا فَتَدَلَّىٰ ﴿٨﴾  
 فَكَانَ قَابَ قَوْسَيْنِ أَوْ أَدْنَىٰ ﴿٩﴾ فَأَوْحَىٰ إِلَىٰ عَبْدِهِ مَا أَوْحَىٰ ﴿١٠﴾  
 مَا كَذَبَ الْفُؤَادُ مَا رَأَىٰ ﴿١١﴾ أَفَتُمَارُونَهُ عَلَىٰ مَا يَرَىٰ ﴿١٢﴾  
 وَلَقَدْ رَأَىٰ نَزْلَةَ أُخْرَىٰ ﴿١٣﴾ عِنْدَ سِدْرَةِ الْمُنْتَهَىٰ ﴿١٤﴾  
 عِنْدَهَا جَنَّةُ الْمَأْوَىٰ ﴿١٥﴾ إِذْ يَغْشَى السِّدْرَةَ مَا يَغْشَىٰ ﴿١٦﴾  
 مَا زَاغَ الْبَصَرُ وَمَا طَغَىٰ ﴿١٧﴾ لَقَدْ رَأَىٰ مِنْ آيَاتِ رَبِّهِ الْكُبْرَىٰ ﴿١٨﴾

wa-n-najmi ʾidhā hawā • wa ḍalla ṣāhibukum wa mā ḡhawā •  
 wa mā yantiqu ʿani-l-hawā • ʾin huwa ʾilla waḥyuñy-yuhā •  
 ʿallamahu ṣhādīdu-l-quwā • ḏhu mirratin fa-s-stawā •  
 wa huwa bi-l-ʾufuqi-l-ʿalā • ṭhumma danā fa-tadallā •  
 fa-kāna qāba qowsayni ow ʾadānā •

fa-ʾowḥāā ʾilā ʿadādihi māā ʾowḥā mā kaḏḡaba-l-fuʾadu mā raʾā •  
 ʾaftumārūnahū ʿalā mā yarā? • wa laqadā raʾahu nazlatan ʾukḡrā •  
 ʿinda sidārat-l-muñtahā • ʿiñdahā jannatu-l-maʾwā •  
 ʾidḡ yagḡshā-s-sidārata mā yagḡshā • mā zāḡḡa-l-baṣaru wa mā ṭagḡhā •  
 la qadā raʾā min ʾāyāti rabbihi-l-kubārāā •

(I swear) by the star when it sets •  
 Your companion is neither astray nor deluded •  
 Nor does he speak on a whim •  
 (His speech) is nothing but Revelation revealed •  
 Taught to him by One of mighty power •  
 Possessed of strength — standing poised •  
 While he was on the highest horizon •

## Sincerity or ʾIkhlās (إخلاص)

Then he drew near and hung — suspended •  
Till he was two bows' length or nearer •  
Then He revealed to His worshipper what He revealed •  
His heart did not lie in what it saw •  
Would you argue with him about what he saw? •  
And truly he saw him yet another time •  
By the Cedar Tree of the outermost boundary •  
Near the Garden of Refuge •  
When there shrouded the Cedar Tree what shrouded it •  
His eye did not waver nor did it stray •  
Indeed he saw the greatest among the signs of His Lord •  
(Sūrah an-Najm 53: 1-18)

Look to his ﷺ fullness in both his roles as a man ﷺ and as a messenger ﷺ and the honor which was attached to his attributes. If you say he ﷺ was just a man, I would say, “Yes, and a diamond is just a stone.” Among the most worshipful slaves he is a Prophet ﷺ and a Messenger ﷺ who called to Truth by Truth. and he endowed the Friends of Allāh ﷺ with a portion of the heritage of prophethood. They are the people who have followed him with the utmost purity and sincerity, believing inwardly and outwardly in what he ﷺ said of Him ﷺ who held his ﷺ life between His Hands.

They station themselves in the Station of Unicity and Sincerity (*maqāmu tawhīd wa ʾikhlaṣ*), removing themselves from the all too powerful cravings of the self and disregarding their lot in this world. They follow their righteous forbearers (*ʾiqtidaʾ bi-salaf*) ﷺ.

The goal of the Folk (*al-qawm* = ṣūfis) is to attain to pure sincerity and singularity. If you look at their humility (*dhullihum*) and their poverty (*ʾiftiqarāhum*), you find glory (*al-ʿizz*) and untold riches (*al-ghina*) from their Master.

The realization of their state, except for the *wali* at his end (*nihāyatahu*) or the devotee (*ṣiddiq*) in his original setting out (*bidāyatahu*) is precious. In reality the destination (*al-ghāyah*) of the *wali* is the point of departure for the pure sincere devotees (*aṣ-ṣiddiqūn*).

Our Shaykh ﷺ says, “That Allāh ﷻ has favored some is obvious! Allāh ﷻ has purified them with the water of His Favor and thus, due to their sincerity, they have reached the rank of purity. The first act of purification, which is a necessary condition for following the ṣufī path, is the turning away from everything other than Allāh ﷻ. Thus they offered their prayer and turned their face to Allāh ﷻ and He communed with them with words delightful to the ear. He gave them to drink from the cups of love and intoxicated them with that Love. He ﷻ gave them to be His Friends as an act of His Favor and when they were perfected He sent them forth to the people as kings in the guise of the poor (*al-fuqarā*).

“The reliance of kings is arms and contending helpers whilst the reliance of the poor is finding sufficiency with Allāh ﷻ and the patient bearing of His Decrees.

“Few are they who love them yet great is their significance. The stars are numerous but when the sun rises they pale to insignificance.

وَقَلِيلٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِيَ الشَّاكِرُونَ

wa qalilum min °ibādiya-sh-shāukūr

— and few of My worshippers are thankful —

(Sūrah Saba 34:13p)

This is the Way of Allāh ﷻ with His Friends. So it is that the excellence of the *wali* often lies in the number of his enemies and the fewness of his supporters (°anṣār). In concordance with the Messenger ﷺ he knows full well.

إِلَّا تَنْصُرُوهُ فَقَدْ نَصَرَهُ اللَّهُ

°illā taṣṣurūhu fa qadā naṣarahu-llāh

If you do not help him, yet Allāh has already helped him...

(Sūrah Tawba 9:40p)



Having now devoted some time to, and touched on, the necessity of sincerity on the part of the seeker in and of him or herself, we must now try to understand the necessity of sincerity in the relation between the seeker (*murīd*) and the sought (*murād*).

Shaykhū-l-Ḥadīth, Mawlanā Muḥammad Zakariyya Kandhlawī ﷺ tells this story that he heard from his father.

“Once upon a time there was a robber and thief. As long as he was young and strong, he continued his life as a highwayman (*dacoit/ڈاکو*), but later when he became old and weak, he consulted his friends as to what work he should do now. They told him that to pretend to be a ‘*Shaykh*’, it being a job from which without much hardship and effort, one can earn a good living. He would then be able to live a life of comfort and ease.

He did just that and became such a ‘*Shaykh*’. It so happened that a true seeker after spiritual progress came to him. The *Shaykh* continued with this pretended piety but the sincerity and earnestness of the *murīd* did not allow him to even think or imagine about the evil ways of the *Shaykh*. In fact he hardly saw them. With great sincerity he told the *Shaykh*: “I have come to you for the sake of Allāh ﷻ, to learn from you the path towards Allāh ﷻ.”

It so happened that he once made the mistake of coming to meet the *Shaykh* at exactly the wrong time, resulting in the *Shaykh* becoming very displeased with him. He said to his student: “The path towards Allāh ﷻ is not easily attained.”

The *Shaykh* gave him a spade and ordered him to go and clean a certain orchard, fix the water channels, repair the buckets and sharpen the pruning hooks. The sincere student immediately took the spade and went off to the orchard and started working on what was much needed repairs.

The owner of the orchard was displeased with this interference in his personal affairs. The student practically begged the farmer: “Please allow me to proceed. I am not coming to take anything from you. My *shaykh* has instructed me to clean and repair this orchard.”

Initially the local people were quite suspicious of him and they even beat and scolded him. But they saw that he never asked for anything, not even food. If he found a piece of dry bread, he ate it. He lived like this for three months.

It is well known among the people of *taṣawwūf* that when an ʾ*abdāl* (أبدال) (one of the forty ʾ*awliyā karam* ﷺ who serve under the direction of the *ghawth*) passes away, his substitute is chosen in the *majlis* of the *ghawth* ﷺ of the time. Well it so happened that a certain ʾ*abdāl* passed away and various names of pious people were submitted to the *majlis*. The *ghawth* listened to all the names put forth and then asked if he could suggest a name.

All of them said: “Certainly.”

He said: “There is a gardener in a certain orchard, who is a most sincere person and who has a sincere desire for spiritual progress. He is busy trying very hard in his efforts.”

All of the ʾ*abdāl* accepted his suggestion. Thereupon the *ghawth* and all his ʾ*abdāl* put their attention on him and immediately he became one of extremely high rank. He gave the spade to the owner of the orchard and asked him to deliver it to the *Shaykh*. Before he left them, they asked him to tell them who he really was. He told them nothing, begged them for pardon and went off. This is what is meant by the well-known saying:

“To have sincere faith and conviction is all that is needed.”

In other words, it does not really matter *who* and *how* the *shaykh* is. The main thing is the faith and sincerity of the *murīd*.

This is of course a story told to illustrate a particular point and should not be generalised but it should be understood in terms of how the *murīd* must come to the *murād*.

Above all sincerity is reflected in the health of the heart of the seeker.

Based on the teachings of ʾIbn Rajab al-Hanbali, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, and ʾImām al-Ghazali ﷺ, we can speak of three differing kinds of hearts.

Just as a heart may be described in terms of being alive or dead, it may also be regarded as belonging to one of three types: the healthy heart, the dead heart, and the sick heart.

### *The Healthy Heart:*

On the Day of Resurrection, only those who come to Allāh ﷻ with a healthy heart will be saved. Allāh ﷻ says: “The day on which neither wealth nor sons will be of any use, except for whoever brings to Allāh a sound heart.”

إِلَّا مَنْ أَتَى اللَّهَ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ

°illā man °ata-llāha bi-qalbin salīm

save for the one who brings to Allāh a sound heart.

(Surah Shūrā° 26:89)

In defining the healthy heart, the following has been said: “It is a heart cleansed from any passion that challenges what Allāh ﷻ commands, or disputes what He forbids. It is free from any impulses which contradict His good.” As a result, it is safeguarded against the worship of anything other than Him, and seeks the judgment of no other than His Messenger ﷺ. Its services are exclusively reserved for Allāh ﷻ, willingly and lovingly, with total reliance, relating all matters to Him, in fear, hope and sincere dedication.

When it loves, its love is in the way of Allāh ﷻ. If it detests, it detests in the light of what He detests. When it gives, it gives for Allāh ﷻ. If it withholds, it withholds for Allāh ﷻ.

Nevertheless, all this will not suffice for its salvation until it is free from following, or taking as its guide, anyone other than His Messenger ﷺ, knowing that those who follow the Prophet ﷺ in observing his *sunnah* and the *shari°ah* are the guides (*shaykh*, *mursheed*) to those who had not met him ﷺ.

A servant with a healthy heart must dedicate it to its journey’s end and must not give precedence to any other faith or words or deeds over those of Allāh ﷻ and His Messenger ﷺ and those who are rightly guided, keeping the Prophetic example. Allāh ﷻ says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَقْدُمُوا بَيْنَ يَدَيِ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ  
وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٤٩﴾

yā ʾayuha-l-ladhīna ʾamanū  
lā tuqadimmū baynayadayi-llāhi wa rasulūlih:  
wa-t-taqū-llāh : inna-llāha samiʿūn ʿalīm

“Oh you who believe,  
do not put yourselves above Allāh and His Messenger,  
but be conscious of Allāh, for Allāh is Hearing, Knowing.”  
(Sūrah al-Hujarāt 49:1)

This is exactly the ʾadab which is demanded of the *murīd* before the *murād*. Indeed this is exactly how the sincere seeker must approach the ṣaykh and all the ʾawliyā karam ۞.

#### *The Dead Heart:*

This is the opposite of the healthy heart. It does not know its Lord and does not worship Him as He commands, in the way which He likes, and with which He is pleased. It clings instead to its lusts and desires, even if these are likely to incur the displeasure and wrath of Allāh ۞. It worships things other than Allāh ۞, and its loves and its hatreds, and its giving and its withholding, arise from its whims, which are of paramount importance to it and preferred above the pleasure of Allāh ۞. Its whims are its ʾimām. Its lust is its guide (*murshid*). Its ignorance is its leader. Its crude impulses are its impetus. It is immersed in its concern with worldly objectives. It is drunk with its own fancies and its love for hasty, fleeting pleasures.

It is called to Allāh ۞ and to the Final World (*al-ʾākhirah*) from a distance but it does not respond to advice, and instead it follows any scheming, cunning ṣhayṭān. Life angers and pleases it, and passion makes it deaf and blind to anything except what is evil.

To associate and keep company with the owner of such a heart is to tempt illness. Living with such a person is like taking poison, and befriending him or her means utter destruction.



### *The Sick Heart:*

This is a heart with life in it, as well as illness. The former sustains it at one moment, the latter at another, and it follows whichever one of the two manages to dominate it. It has love for Allāh ﷻ, faith in Him, sincerity towards Him, and reliance upon Him, and these are what give it life. It also has a craving for lust and pleasure, and prefers them and strives to experience them. It is full of self-admiration, which can lead to its own destruction. It listens to two callers: one calling it to Allāh ﷻ and His Prophet ﷺ and the afterlife (*al-°ākhirah*) and the other calling it to the fleeting pleasures of this world. It responds to whichever one of the two happens to have most influence over it at the time.

The first heart is alive, submitted to Allāh ﷻ, humble, sensitive and aware; the second is brittle and dead; the third wavers between safety and ruin.



هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ السَّكِينَةَ فِي قُلُوبِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ لِيَزْدَادُوا إِيمَانًا مَعَ إِيمَانِهِمْ ؕ  
وَلِلَّهِ جُنُودُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ؕ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا

huwa-lladhī °ańzala-s-sakīnata fī qulūbi-l-mu°minīna  
li-yazdādū °imānam-mā °imānihim’  
wa li-llāhi junūdu-s-samāwāti wa-l-°arḍ  
wa kāna-llāhu °alimān ḥakīm

He it is Who sent down calmness and tranquility  
into the hearts of the believers,  
that they may grow more in Faith along with their (present) Faith.  
To Allāh belong the hosts of the heavens and the earth  
and Allāh is All-Knowing, All-Wise.

(Sūrah al-Faṭḥ 48:4)



## Four-Symptoms Of the Heart's Sickness and Signs of Its Health

### *The Signs of a Sick Heart:*

The seeker's heart may be ill, and seriously deteriorating, while he or she remains oblivious of its condition. It may even die without him realising it. The symptoms of its sickness, or the signs of its death, are that the owner is not aware of the harm that results from the damage caused by wrong actions, and is unperturbed by his ignorance of the truth or by his or her false beliefs.

Since the living heart experiences pain as a result of any ugliness that it encounters and through its recognising its ignorance of the truth (to a degree that corresponds to its level of awareness), it is capable of recognizing the onset of decay—and the increase in the severity of the remedy that will be needed to stop it—but then sometimes it prefers to put up with the pain rather than undergo the arduous trial of the cure!

Some of the many signs of the heart's sickness are its turning away from wholesome foods to harmful ones, and from useful remedies to shameful sickness. The healthy heart prefers what is beneficial and healing to what is harmful and damaging; the sick heart prefers the opposite. The most beneficial sustenance for the heart is faith and the best medicine is the Qurʾān.

### *The Signs of a Healthy Heart:*

For the heart to be healthy it should depart from this life and arrive in the next, and then settle there as if it were one of its people knowing that it only came to this life as a passer-by, taking whatever provisions it needed, and will soon be returning home. As the Prophet ﷺ said to ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿUmar رضي الله عنه, “Be in this world as if you were a stranger or a passer-by.” The more diseased the heart is, the more it desires this world (*ad-dunyā*); it dwells in it until it becomes like one of its people.

The healthy heart continues to trouble its owner (*nafs al-lawamma*) until he returns to Allāh ﷻ, and comes to be at peace (*nafs al-mutmaʿinna*) with Him ﷻ, and reaches Him ﷻ, like a lover driven by compulsion who finally reaches his beloved.

يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ۖ ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً ۖ  
فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي ۖ وَادْخُلِي جَنَّاتِي ۖ

yā ā ʾayutuha-n-nafsu-l-muṭmaʾinna •  
irjiʿi ʾila rabbika raḍitam mardiyah  
fa-dākhulī fī ʿibādī • wa-dākhulī jannatī

Oh you self that is tranquil!

Return to your Lord pleased and well pleasing.

Enter with My worshippers — enter My Garden

(Sūrah al-Fajr 89: 27-30)

Besides his love for Allāh ﷻ he needs no other, and after invoking Allāh ﷻ no other invocations are needed. Serving Allāh ﷻ precludes the need to serve any other.

If this heart misses its share of reciting the Qurʾān and invoking Allāh (*dhikrullāh*), or completing one of the prescribed acts of worship, then its owner suffers more distress than a cautious man who suffers because of the loss of money or a missed opportunity to make it. It longs to serve and worship Allāh ﷻ, just as a famished person longs for food and drink.

Yaḥya ibn Muʿadh رضى الله عنه said:

“Whoever is pleased with serving Allāh ﷻ, the sincere believers will be pleased to serve him; and whoever finds pleasure in contemplating Allāh ﷻ, sincere believers will find pleasure in contemplating him.”

This heart has only one concern: that all its actions, and its inner thoughts and utterances, are in active obedience to Allāh ﷻ. It is more careful with its time than the meanest people are with their money, so that it will not be spent wastefully. When it enters into the prayer, all its worldly worries and anxieties vanish and it finds its comfort and bliss in adoring its Lord. It does not cease to mention Allāh ﷻ, nor tire of serving Him, and it finds intimate company with no one save a person who guides it to Allāh ﷻ and reminds the heart of Him ﷻ.

Its attention to the correctness of its action is greater than its attention to the action itself. It is scrupulous in making sure that the intentions behind its actions are sincere and pure and that they result in good deeds.

As well as, and in spite of all this, it not only testifies to the generosity of Allāh ﷻ in giving it the opportunity to carry out such actions, but also testifies to its own imperfection and shortcomings in executing them.

### *The Causes of Sickness of the Heart:*

The temptations to which the heart is exposed are what cause its sickness. These are the temptations of desires and fancies. The former cause intentions and the will to be corrupted, and the latter cause knowledge and belief to falter.

Hudhayfa ibn al-Yamanī ؓ said that the Messenger ﷺ said, “Temptations are presented to the heart, one by one.

Any heart that accepts them will be left with a black stain, but any heart that rejects them will be left with a mark of purity, so that hearts are of two types: a dark heart that has turned away and become like an overturned broken vessel, and a pure heart that will never be harmed by temptation for as long as the earth and the heavens exist. The dark heart only recognises good and denounces evil when this suits its desires and whims.”

The Prophet ﷺ placed hearts, when exposed to temptation, into two categories:

First, a heart which, when it is exposed to temptation, absorbs it like a sponge that soaks up water, leaving a black stain in it. It continues to absorb each temptation that is offered to it until it is darkened and corrupted, which is what he meant by “like an overturned broken vessel”. When this happens, two dangerous sicknesses take hold of it and plunge it into ruin:

A heart of this first category confuses good with evil, to such an extent that it does not recognize the former and does not denounce the latter.

This sickness may even gain hold of it to such an extent that it believes good to be evil and vice-versa, the *sunnah* to be *bida*<sup>c</sup> and vice-versa, the truth to be false and falsity to be the truth.

A heart of this category, in contradiction to the ʾāyat we mentioned earlier in Sūrah al-Hujarāt 49:1, sets up its own desires as its judge, over and above what Allāh ﷻ and His Prophet ﷺ taught, so that it winds up beings enslaved and led by its whims and fancies.

One the other hand, a pure heart is a heart in which the light of faith is bright and from which radiance shines. When temptations are presented to a pure heart, the pure heart opposes it and rejects it, and so the light and illumination only increase.

نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ ۚ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَن يَشَاءُ

nūrun ʿala nūr : yahdi-llāhu li-nūrihi mañy-yashāʾ

Light upon Light — Allāh guides to His Light whom He chooses  
(Sūrah an-Nūr 24:35)



This understanding of the necessity for a pure heart is not unique to the Final Revelation contained in al-Qurʾān, but is both universal and constant throughout hierohistory, as attested by the following passages found in the earlier Revelation contained in the Tanakh (Old Testament) in Hebrews 10:22 where we find the following passage, “Let us draw near to G-d with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

נקרבה נא בלבב שלם ובאמונה תמימה מטהרים בהזית לבבנו  
מרוח רעה ורחוצי בשר במים טהורים

and in the ʾInjīl (New Testament) where we find in Matthew 5:8:

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see G-d.”

μακάριοι οἱ καθαρὸι τῇ καρδίᾳ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ τὸν  
θεὸν ὄψονται



Having spoken about the need for sincerity in and of the self, sincerity in relation to the Prophet ﷺ – and by extension with those who are his representatives in the present, the ʾawliyāʾ-llāh karām ﷺ and the company of rightly guided shuyukh, murshids and various nourishers and fosterers of souls ﷺ — we come to the final area of our concern in this talk which is the all important need for sincerity in our relations with Allāh ﷻ.

Sincerity in this instance is wholehearted belief in Allāh ﷻ and utmost devotion.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَآخَبْتُوا إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ  
أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ ۖ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

ʾinna-l-ladhīna ʾāmanū wa ʾamilū-ṣ-ṣāliḥātī  
wa ʾakḥbatū ʾila rabbiḥim

ʾulāāʾika ʾaṣḥābu-l-jannah : hum fihā khālīdūn

Truly those who believe and perform good deeds  
and humble themselves before their Lord

they are companions of the Garden, remaining in it timelessly.

(Sūrah Hūd 11:23)

Sincerity means being deeply devoted to Allāh ﷻ in one's heart, in one's mind and acting with one's body in accord with that devotion. This is what is called ʾiḥsān, meaning that you worship Allāh ﷻ as though you see Allāh ﷻ knowing that even if you do not see Allāh ﷻ yet Allāh ﷻ surely sees you. A sincere person has a deep consciousness (taqwah) of Allāh ﷻ, profoundly believes in Allāh ﷻ, and advocates justice and righteousness in the best way which is to enjoin the good and forbid the evil (ʾamr al-marūf and nahy ʾan al-munkar).

A sincere person is the one who believes in Allāh ﷻ with all certainty (yaqīn), who believes in the Angels, in all the Prophets ﷺ, in their Messages and Books, in the existence of the inscrutable Power of Allāh ﷻ (qadrullāh), in the reality of death, the grave and the Judgement to come, who believes in the reality of the Final World (al-ʾākḥira) and proves it in this world by loving for his fellow human being what he loves for himself in accord with the

*saḥīḥ ḥadīth*: “No one is a believer in Allāh ﷻ until he loves for others what he loves for himself (*lā yu°min bi-llāhi hatta yuḥib li akḥihi mā yuḥib li nafsī*)

What is essential in all of this is not that you think that *you* are sincere or others do but that Allāh recognises your sincerity.

The Prophet ﷺ as well as °Isā, Mūsā, °Ibraḥīm, Nuḥ, and °Ādam as well as others such as Da°ud, Sulaymān, Yunus, °Ayyub, Ya°qūb and Yusuf ﷺ and all the other Prophets are the sincere servants of Allāh. We are aware of their sincerity because Allāh ﷻ sees them as sincere and declares them to be so. All of our Prophets ﷺ were blessed people who were devoted to Allāh ﷻ with great love and experienced sincerity in its most profound state. Due to their sincerity, all the Prophets, known and unknown ﷺ, were blessed people who acted on the basis of their belief (°imān), whose deeds resulted in good and beauty and who turned to Allāh ﷻ for all their needs. It was not that they thought of themselves as sincere, but that Allāh ﷻ vouchsafed and guaranteed their sincerity both to them ﷺ and to us.

Due to consciousness and awareness (*taqwah*) of Allāh ﷻ along with profound love of Allāh ﷻ, a sincere person is someone who is capable of discriminating between right and wrong and absolutely implements what is right according to the Revelation and, without seeing any limits in closeness to Allāh ﷻ and love of Allāh ﷻ, who discharges all the requirements of the religion (*dīn*) in the most careful, accurate and absolute manner (*wara°*). Consequently, sincerity is the kind of attitude which appears with fear (*kḥawf*) of offending Allāh ﷻ, as well as closeness (*qurb*) and love (*maḥabbah*) of Allāh ﷻ.

If a Christian, who is devoid of any °Islāmic knowledge, advocates the being of Allāh ﷻ, believes in Heaven and the Hell, has faith in the Hereafter, performs his prayers, fasts, albeit in his own way, and pays the alms we can hope they will have the reward for what he or she has done. Similarly, for a Jew who has no knowledge about °Islām, we can also hope that such a person will likewise have the reward of eternal bliss as long as that person observes what is

lawful and unlawful, performs his prayers and fasts. All of these are the commandments stated in the Torah and the °Injīl. If he is sincere and has no knowledge about °Islām, by the permission (°idhīn) of Allāh ﷻ we may hope that a Christian or a Jew can also enter the Garden as long as that person wholeheartedly and, all importantly, sincerely fulfills *all* their obligations in accord with the Revelation they have received.

Such people are on the *fiṭra* and are of the *hunaḡā°a* and that they are so is due entirely to the sincerity of their being. Hence the great importance of sincerity towards Allāh ﷻ.

وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَيَعْلَمُ مَا تُكِنُّ صُدُورُهُمْ وَمَا يُعْلِنُونَ

wa °inna rabbaka laya°lamu mā tukinnu ṣudūruhum wa mā yu°linūn  
And surely your Lord knows all that is hidden in their hearts  
and that which they make known.

(Sūrah Naml 27:74)

Allāh ﷻ knows all that is concealed and revealed and, in the beginning and the end Allāh ﷻ knows best the sincerity that dwells in a person's heart. As Allāh ﷻ says:

رَبُّكُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا فِي نُفُوسِكُمْ ؕ  
إِنْ تَكُونُوا صَالِحِينَ فَإِنَّهُ كَانَ لِلْأَوَّابِينَ غَفُورًا

rabbukum °a°lamu bimā fī nufūsikum ;  
°in takūnu ṣāliḡīna fa-°innahu kāna li-°awābīna ḡhafūrā

Allāh is best aware of what is in your selves.

If you are righteous [He will forgive you]  
for surely to those who frequently return [in repentance]  
He is ever-forgiving.

(Sūrah al-°Isrā° 17:25)

Every time a sincere person makes a mistake, he remembers his weakness before Allah ﷻ and turns to Him, because he knows it is only Allāh ﷻ who can truly forgive.

In other words, when making a mistake, a believer repents with sincerity and doesn't concern himself over what people think.



Those who try to please others and concern themselves with their opinions tend to make mistakes more often because of their effort to conceal them. The truth is, however, even if they can deceive others, in the beginning and in the end Allāh ﷻ knows everything. Dishonest and insincere people ultimately inflict the heaviest loss only on their own souls.

Allāh ﷻ imposes no burden on a person greater than he or she can bear. Furthermore, He ﷻ has promised to forgive His sincere servants, provided their wrongdoing is committed by mistake. These are glad tidings that Allāh ﷻ gives to believers:

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا ۚ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا اكْتَسَبَتْ ۗ

lā yukallifu-llāhu nafsan °illā wus°ahā  
lahā mā kasabat wa °alayhā ma-k-tasabat

Allāh does not burden any soul with more than it can bear  
To its account is what it has merited  
and against it is what it has earned.

(Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:286)

It is only Allāh ﷻ to Whom a person must be dedicated with true sincerity. A person may be ignorant; he may also be unknowledgeable of things he must do to please Allāh ﷻ, but Allāh ﷻ will surely guide to the straight path those who truly desire to turn to Him ﷻ. What is important is to be sincerely devoted to Allāh ﷻ. Who has given the good news that whoever surrenders (°istislām) and is submissive to Him ﷻ will not suffer loss:

وَمَنْ يُسَلِّمْ وَجْهَهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ  
فَقَدْ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَى ۚ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ عَاقِبَةُ الْأُمُورِ ﴿٢٠٨﴾

wa mañy-yaslim wajāhahu °ila-llāhi wa huwa muħsinun  
fa-qadā °istamsaka bi-l-°urwati-wuthqa wa °ila-llāhi °aqibatu-l-°umur

Whoever surrenders his whole self to Allāh while doing good  
has indeed grasped the unfailing firm hand-hold  
and with Allāh rests the final outcome of all orders.

(Sūrah Luqmān 31:22)

## Sincerity or ʾIkhlāṣ (إخلاص)

Never ignore the reminders you receive, and never forget that the one and only way to attain salvation, both in this world and beyond, is to turn to Allāh ﷻ with a trusting sincere heart.

When one is blessed with power and spiritual vision and remembers in this world the next world consequentially, one seeks to perfect his or her actions through the development and purification of one's intention (*niyah*) lest, through forgetfulness (*ghaflah*), he or she is reduced to looking back upon this life with regret, realizing that there is nothing left to indicate that one had spent years in this world and gained no lasting reward.

The capital of the Path is, as the Prophet ﷺ said, nothing less than sincerity. Sincerity has been defined as “showing yourself as you really are” and “being inwardly what you show yourself to be”.

Beyond this are only more words and so we end where we began and Allāh ﷻ knows best.



وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ۗ

wa-la-dhikru-llāhi ʾakbar

and the remembrance of Allāh is the greatest!

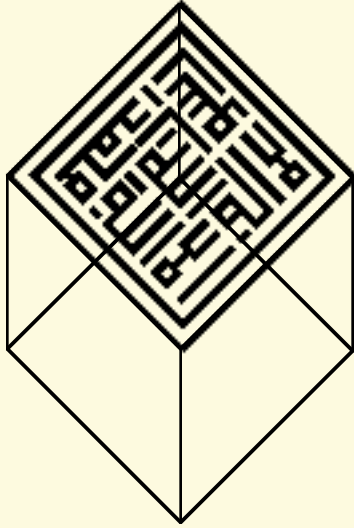
(Sūrah al-Aʿnākabūt 29:45)



wa-llāhu ʿalim



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